

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 002014

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR S/ES, INR/MR, PA  
SA/INS (CAMP, SIM, GOWER) SA/PD (SCENSNY, ROGERS,  
PALLADINO); SSA/PAS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: PHUM KPAO PTER E AID OIIP PREL CE LTTE

SUBJECT: Special Media Reaction: LTTE Leader Vellupillai  
Prabhakaran 2005 Heroes' Day Speech

REFTEL: Colombo 2008

1. (SBU) Summary: Following LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran's annual Heroes' Day speech on November 27(reftel), Sri Lankan television and newspapers on November 28 and 29 focused on the future of the peace process with a renewed sense of hope and pragmatism. In response to the election of President Rajapakse, who opposes a federal solution to the ethnic conflict, Sri Lankan media had expected a fiery speech from Prabhakaran possibly announcing the Tigers' withdrawal from the Ceasefire Agreement. However, English and Sinhala papers presented his speech positively, emphasizing several of the Tiger leader's more conciliatory statements while ignoring the vast (less conciliatory) majority of his speech. Pro-LTTE and Tamil media focused instead on the speech's overtone of the threat of war if President Rajapakse does not pursue a solution acceptable to the LTTE soon. End Summary.

2. (U) In the English press, the pro-LTTE Tamil Net website ran a transcript of Prabhakaran's statement first on Sunday evening (11/27) with a headline, "LTTE to intensify struggle for self determination if reasonable political solution not offered soon." Following the Tiger leader's Heroes' Day speech, Monday's (11/28) papers responded with lead stories and transcripts of the speech on inside pages. Government owned media predictably emphasized a "multi-party approach to peace" allegedly sanctioned by the Tiger leader. Below the fold, government owned papers bannered, "Prabhakaran calls for political solution." The independent Daily Mirror led with, "LTTE to maintain ceasefire: Prabhakaran says they will wait and see; describes President Rajapakse as a realist committed to pragmatic politics." Even Sinhala nationalist independent media gave the LTTE the benefit of the doubt on the morning after the speech; the independent Island led with, "Tigers to wait and see till next year." Other independent media maintained a suspicious view of the LTTE's intentions; the independent Lanka Academic website, which shares key journalists with the Island, led with "Rebel leader serves ultimatum to Sri Lanka: Resolve Tamil issue or face independence fight."

2. (U) Government and independent Sinhala papers also emphasized Prabhakaran's brief praise of the Sri Lankan President in his Heroes' Day speech. Independent Sinhala daily Lankadeepa (11/28) ran a prominent above the fold headline, "New President is a realist, we'll wait for a short time to do justice to the Tamil people, says Prabhakaran." Independently owned Sinhala daily Lakbima (11/28) led with, "Tiger leader says they'll watch the conduct of the new government with patience."

3. (SBU) On the other hand, Tamil papers emphasized the political divide between Rajapakse and Prabhakaran despite an air of hope. Government-owned Thinakaran did not lead with Prabhakaran's speech but did banner a front page headline, "The solution should satisfy the political aspirations of Tamils - If rejected alternate action - V. Prabhakaran." Independent Tamil dailies Virakesari, Thinakkural and pro-LTTE Tamil daily Sudar Oli termed the Hero's Day message a clear warning to the Government of Sri Lanka. Independent Thinakkural (11/28) led with, "Prabhakaran gives time limit to Mahinda to put forward an acceptable solution." Pro-LTTE Sudar Oli (11/28) headlined, "Short time limit to Mahinda - Prabhakaran." Independent Virakesari (11/28) led with, "We will start the struggle next year if no solution within short period." To independent Tamil papers there was no question Prabhakaran meant business; the LTTE would intensify their struggle for self determination next year if the President failed to put forward an acceptable solution.

4. (SBU) Two days after the Heroes' Day speech, English and Sinhala editorial comment began to take a more suspicious perspective. The mainstream independent English Daily Mirror made a measured contention that despite Prabhakaran's assertion the Sinhalese "do not perceive the existential reality of the Tamils," the Sinhalese majority has now acknowledged the "injustice and indignities suffered by

Tamil people in the past. They also have a clear awareness of the reasonable aspirations not only of the Tamils but of other minority communities. It did not owe to lack of concern" for Tamil tsunami victims that so-called "Sinhala extremists" opposed the joint mechanism for tsunami relief, "but because of the ingrained suspicions they have about the LTTE motives." Independently-owned Sinhala daily Lankadeepa (11/29) asked readers to note the entirety of Prabhakaran's speech: "It is commendable that the LTTE has become flexible enough to give a peace deadline to the new government. Although we should not forget that the many factors that contributed to this attitude of the Tigers. They are less able to pursue war after the Karuna split and heavy international pressure. The authorities should not forget that time is ticking."

15. (SBU) Tamil editorial comment remained somewhat positive towards the fate of the peace process but echoed the Tiger warning that war could be inevitable. Independent editors called upon President Rajapakse to prove to the public he is not a racist by pursuing the peace process expediently. Pro-LTTE Tamil daily Sudar Oli (11/29)blamed "the Southern media" of distorting the contents of the speech made by the LTTE leader, stating the Sinhala media and political leaders have misunderstood Prabhakaran's message "between the lines," which is that President Rajapakse has three months to find a political solution acceptable to the LTTE.

16. (SBU) Comment: The government-controlled media predictably emphasized Prabhakaran's brief praise of President Rajapakse as a pragmatist, and independent English and Sinhala media also for the most part lauded the Heroes' Day speech as an indication of a political solution to the ethnic conflict would be forth-coming. Despite positive headlines, however, predominantly Sinhala newspapers invited readers to see the bigger picture by publishing full transcripts of the speech. Tamil and pro-LTTE media perhaps more accurately portrayed the entirety of Prabhakaran's message, that despite a resigned commitment to pursue a political solution for the time being, the LTTE leader did not rule out a possible return to war. End Comment.

Lunstead